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ABSTRACT

The world of mass communications has been hard hit by the decline in advertising revenues in print and electronic media, resulting in very few internships for undergraduates and making these students much less attractive as candidates for entry level jobs in advertising. Consequently, advertising faculty should reassess their programs to better prepare their students for the realities of the job market. Many schools of business operate a Small Business Institute (SBI) program, supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration, and these might provide a useful way to gain access to the advertising needs of small businesses across the nation. Numerous studies show that small businesses are eager for assistance in planning and creating business advertising strategies. A course was developed in which an SBI is contacted and a business willing to be the subject in an advanced advertising project is located, thus helping both the business and the educational and experiential needs of the students. The business determines the advertising budget, and the students allocate the budget and deliver the advertising campaign. Students conduct the situation analysis research, establish advertising objectives, and prepare a media plan for the company. The final execution of the campaign is up to the business. Incorporating such a situation into the advertising course allows students a taste of the "real world," with the experience and additions to personal portfolios it provides significantly enhancing the market value of students as they enter the job market. (Twenty-four references are attached.) (HB)

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BRINGING THE "REAL WORLD" INTO THE ADVERTISING CLASSROOM

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Introduction

When interviewing job candidates for advertising positions, two common inquiries are presented.

"What experience have you had?" and "May I see your portfolio?" A favorable reply to either query requires the candidate to have worked in advertising in order to have experience and a portfolio. For new college graduates the typical way to acquire these job prerequisites was through student internships, an educational process that is becoming harder to find today [9].

The world of mass communications has seen rough financial times over the past few years [c.f. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 19, 20, 23]. The decline in ad revenues has had a disastrous impact on print and electronic media [7, 8, 14, 15, 19, 20].

B. Steven Nisberg, USA employment manager for Young & Rubicam, explains that the greater emphasis on bottom-line profitability is achieved most often by cutting expenses and laying off people [5, 13]. The most expendable expenses appear to be training programs which include internships [9]. To compound the situation, even summer jobs in a variety of related areas are also becoming scarce [6]. And, if that is not enough, new advertising graduates are now finding the few entry level positions that are available are also being sought by business majors with graduate degrees, a group of people who usually worked before entering graduate school [17].

In addition to fewer available intern slots, most that are available tend to be located in larger metropolitan areas yet many advertising programs are in schools in urban areas, not near internship sites.

Recently this author examined this situation in his school's area, the southwestern part of the United States. Using Ross and Johnson's Guide to US College Advertising Programs [21], twenty-one schools were identified offering a major or sequence in advertising in the six southwestern states of Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Of these schools almost half (43%) are located in communities of 100,000 or less. A check of internship positions listed in the 1991 American

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Advertising Federation Internship Directory revealed only sixteen of which eleven were located just in Texas. Examining the 1991 Career Press book Internships in Advertising, Marketing, Public Relations, & Sales showed only eight agencies offering internships in the Southwest with three being in Texas and three in Oklahoma. I would suspect that other areas of the United States are like this because so many advertising intern positions are located on the two coasts with a few metropolitan enclaves in between.

If entry-level career positions in advertising favor new graduates with experience, and experience is harder to obtain, what can we, as advertising faculty, do to help our students?

Internship Alternatives

What options might be available for students and programs not located in large cities where most ad agencies are located?

The American Advertising Federation National Student Advertising Campaign is one alternative but it has two drawbacks. One, the students do not have any chance of interacting with real, live clients. As a result decisions are based on input data from the ADFED headquarters and guesses by the students. Two, the NSAC is a very expensive proposition for a school and, while numerous students work on the campaign, only five students actually participate in the presentation.

Another option might be to create a student ad agency and solicit local businesses [16]. This too, has its drawbacks. At times, especially in smaller communities, local ad agencies do not appreciate the competition, particularly if the competition comes from a tax-supported state institution. Setting up, administering, and overseeing a student operation requires considerable time and business knowledge on the part of the faculty advisor. Also, few students desire the job of locating clients, most want to do the creative work, not the selling.

Another option might be to locate various businesses that create considerable advertising and seek a paid intern position for a student. Automobile dealerships, large banks, hospitals, shopping malls are examples of businesses that consume considerable air time or print space for their advertising. In financially severe times though, businesses usually cannot afford an intern position and for many, even unpaid positions are not considered because staff cutbacks have eliminated those who could supervise the intern.

Small Business Institute

Across the US there are over 500 schools of business at colleges and universities that operate a Small Business Institute (SBI), a program supported by the U.S. Small Business Administration [c.f. 3, 4, 11, 12, 18, 22].

The SBI is a joint effort between undergraduate and graduate schools of business and the Business Development Division of the Small Business Administration (SBA). The fifty states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands are divided into ten SBI regions with approximately 511 SBI programs.

The purpose of the SBI is two-fold: to augment the classroom education of business students by providing an opportunity to work with "real world" problems facing actual businesses, and to provide free management assistance and/or consulting to proposed or existing small businesses.

Typically for-profit businesses in a community are invited to partake in the SBI program at the beginning of each semester with the consultation terminating at the end of the semester. To be eligible for this program the business must have a problem or concern that falls within the level of competence of the students and can be solved in a semester.

While the range of requests for assistance covers the gamut of all subjects taught within business schools, there tends to be some requests that are commonly sought, time and again.

Reagan and Gavin [18] reported in 1987 on small business owners' most frequent requests for information from attendees at a four night "How to start and operate a small business" seminar. The top five requests involved: financing, advertising, accounting records, cash flow, and market planning.

Another 1987 study mentioned the consulting most often sought from SBI programs were marketing practices (to include advertising) and accounting [4].

Tinsley and Gresham [22] in a 1989 study exploring the assistance needs of small businesses in rural areas found that most firms needed help with their advertising programs, especially seeking help on the most effective media to select.

Joyce and Young [12] in 1991 presented findings that showed marketing, advertising, and sales assistance were the top requests for counseling by small businesses in Region VI SBI programs.

These studies clearly support the demand by small businesses for assistance in planning and creating advertising strategies.

In mid-1991 this author was contacted by the district SBA office and asked if he would be interested in exploring the possibility of doing an SBI project in an advanced advertising class. Previously the author had been an SBI director in a business school at another university in a different state.

Frustrated by the lack of realistic applied experience for many advertising students, the author agreed to accept an SBI case for the capstone advertising class, "Advertising Campaigns," for the Fall of 1991.

Inquiries to the SBI National Programs Manager in Washington, DC, and the newly established Small Business Advancement National Center, and the SBI Directors Association National Center, co-located at the University of Central Arkansas, revealed that no information existed of any SBI cases ever being done outside a business school. Our experiment was the first [24].

The fall semester project proved to be an enthusiastically received addition to the course. The students were able to apply what they had been taught in previous advertising courses by creating an actual advertising campaign for an ongoing business. The project required weekly interaction with the client [24] and the creation of a multi-media advertising campaign plan.

SBI Projects

Most business schools operate the SBI program basically the same. Before each semester begins the SBI director and the SBA district office advertise in local papers for SBI clients. The request must come from a small business owner or manager or someone wanting to start a small business. The request must be within the capabilities of the SBI students, and must be substantial enough to provide a three month learning experience.

After the SBI has received the request, someone (the SBI director, a graduate student, or a faculty member) must visit the business and evaluate the request to ensure it meets the SBI guidelines. If accepted the project then is assigned to a professor and his/her class.

For the advertising campaign class, the SBI project request must be for the creation of a multi-media (six-months or longer) advertising campaign plan for a small business. The business must also have the financial strength to implement the plan even

though there is no requirement for them to do so. The business determines the advertising budget size, the students develop the allocation of the budget.

The students conduct the situation analysis research, establish the advertising objective(s) based on the research and the business marketing plan, develop the concept of the creative strategies, prepare the media plan, create the budget, and come up with a means to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan. The actual creation of the finished ads are up to the business. The students create examples of ad copy, radio scripts, television story boards, direct mail pieces, and other ad concepts sufficient to allow the client to see and understand what the creative strategies would look like. The final execution of the ads is up to the business.

The SBA requires a written report which for the advertising projects is a 30 to 50 page advertising campaign plan. At the end of the course each student team (three to five students per team) makes a formal twenty minute presentation to the client.

In two semesters, eight projects have been completed. In the fall of 1991 two non-SBI projects were done (ad campaigns for a local medical center and the Salvation Army) and one SBI project, an ad campaign to encourage people to shop local stores. The client was the Chamber of Commerce. While the Chamber is a non-profit organization the SBA approved the project because it would benefit most retail businesses in the community.

During the spring of 1992 five more projects were completed. Creating an image campaign for a women's clothing store, an awareness campaign for a new microfilm laboratory, and ad campaigns for a retail nut store, an organic grocery store, and a tavern were the projects accepted and completed. Word of mouth by the students has already supplied enough requests for the 1992 fall semester.

As with any government project, paperwork is required. This is not a burden though and takes little time. The advertising professor should visit each business to ascertain the request and the project will fit into the course requirements and the course schedule. Upon accepting the client a one page SBA form is completed. Halfway through the semester the same form is filled out again, describing the progress of the project. At the end of the semester a final report is rendered along with more forms and a copy of the advertising plan.

The faculty responsibility is dual. The professor must insure the project will become a teaching tool and serve as a

mentor for the students throughout the project. Also the teacher has a responsibility to the client who is seeking professional help to solve a genuine business problem. Concerns of confidentiality, respect, and professional conduct must always be above reproach.

The SBI at the business school receives $500 for every SBI case satisfactorily completed. Part of this should be given to the professor or his/her department for overseeing the case.

Conclusions

Incorporating an SBI case (or cases) into an appropriate advertising course allows students the opportunity to experience the "real world" in the classroom. Due to the amount of time required to satisfactorily complete an SBI project, it is recommended the project be a focal part of the course. For an advertising campaign course SBI cases are excellent. The initial weeks of the course can be devoted to reviewing what goes into the creation of a campaign with the rest of the course devoted to creating an actual campaign plan.

A single SBI case involving the creation of a few local ads may be ideally suited to a copy writing or graphics course. Helping a business better understand how to plan and buy media space and time might be an SBI case for a media planning and buying course.

For professors who prefer classroom lectures with little deviation from a text this may not prove worthwhile. For professors who enjoy hands-on projects where students and faculty can work together to demonstrate how advertising can successfully solve business problems, an SBI project may be a viable alternative to an internship experiences. For more information contact your business school SBI director.

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